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Co-operative Union Ltd.

How Bob became a
co-operator, and what...

Manchester

[189-]

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HOW BOB

Became a Co-operator,

AND WHAT HE THOUGHT OF IT.

NEIGHBOUR, some years ago, I got acquainted with a scheme that has done me good service, and it will do you good, too, if you will try it. So I will inform you how I got it.

Hard times, and then a helpless family, made me so that I could neither sleep by night, nor enjoy my meals, nor anything else, by day. And while rolling on my bed, I tried and tried to discover some means of bettering my condition. I knew that many a one, when prompted by necessity, had hit upon grand ideas. So I resolved to try what I could do; for if I failed I could be no worse off; but if I should succeed—O, blissful future! Then farewell to poverty and its train of miseries. I might yet enjoy life, and be of use in my day and generation.

I had heard of the co-operative movement; but the shopkeeper's wife, where we got our bits of groceries, &c., laughed at it, and said that it was only the mad scheme of a few dissatisfied Rochdale weavers. But I said to myself, mad or not mad, I will know more about it before I sleep to-night.

So I asked a fellow-workman, if he could tell me anything about this *move* called "Co-operation?" and he said—"Yes, lad! and it's just the thing for thee and

me. I happen to have been acquainted with it before I came here, and to have a tract or two about it, which you can have to read, if you like; for if half be true that is said about it, it really is a *goose that lays golden eggs*, and I should like to have a share in one of its goslings."

I said—"Mate, it's too bad to make fun of a fellow because he is not as well read as yourself." Then his countenance instantly changed, and he replied—

"Bob, I like a bit of fun, or a good joke, as well as anyone, but I feel too keenly for a hard-working fellow like yourself, with five mouths to fill besides your own, to deceive or mislead you. So, to let you see that I am in earnest, I promise that I will help you to the utmost of my power, after you have read more on the subject, and got a few others to join us, so that we may start a store of our own; for some of my old chums who have gone into towns where Co-operative stores are carried on, have told me in their letters that the benefit, in a direct way, is as good to them as a rise of 10 or 15 per cent on their wages; and, in an indirect way, of much more, for it has caused them to give up some foolish and expensive habits, and to take to other ways and company that are elevating both to themselves and their families.

"Indeed, it takes my fancy so much that the word 'Co-operation' catches my eye and ear instantly I see or hear it, and I read all that I can lay hold of that mentions it. If you have time to listen, I will tell you, as well as I can, some of its leading features and objects, for you are just the man that can appreciate it, and help to work it out with enlightened and determined energy.

"I am convinced in my own mind that it is the best and most equitable scheme that has been broached hitherto; for it makes a man feel he is a man, and that he has a higher purpose to serve than merely living to work, eat, drink, and sleep; to feel that he may do much to lessen human woe, and to increase the individual and general happiness of the human race; and it just comes to this—while he is doing his best for himself and every-

body else, that everybody else connected with the movement are in their turn doing their best for him—each for the good of all, and all for the good of each. So now for the objects and benefits which Co-operators are to obtain at less cost than they are now obtainable—purer and better food, better clothing and fuel, better dwellings and incomes, and better education and habits."

I asked—"And how is this to be done?"

He said—"I will answer that question by asking a few more. How do we get such a good supply of pure water from a river miles away? How do we obtain such cheap and brilliant light in our streets and dwellings? How is it that a man can travel from one end of Britain to the other in a day? or even circumnavigate the earth in a few months? Or how is it that neither seas nor oceans prevent us knowing in a few hours the sayings and doings of others in the most distant parts of the earth, and talking with them almost, as it were, face to face? The united pounds of the rich—the mighty dollars—do this.

"Let us then take a leaf out of their book, and see if the united pence of the million cannot accomplish even greater things than these. But to illustrate our power of saving—suppose that forty of us club together, and get half a chest, or 40lbs. best tea from a wholesale merchant. We should get it delivered free at 2s. 6d. per lb., instead of having to pay 2½d. or 3d. per ounce for it to the grocers. This 40lbs. of tea would cost us £5 instead of £6. 13s. 4d. at the lower price, or £8 at the higher price, which is often paid. At the lower price we should have a clear gain of £1. 13s. 4d. on the sum laid out in the purchase. That is supposing we weighed out the tea ourselves at balance weight, if there were no overweight. Again: suppose this to be done four times a year, what would be the result, Bob? A clear gain of £6. 13s. 4d. The golden goose (£5) would have produced more than its own weight in gold. Was it a joke, then, when I said that Co-operation was a goose that laid golden eggs?"

"No, no,—but a solid reality. For there are several societies which keep their capital turning, that are really making cent per cent on their capital during the year. So we must have a gosling, Bob, in the shape of a store of our own; for what applies to tea applies to other groceries, provisions, coals, &c., &c."

I have only to add that my mate was as good as his word, and with a hard and united struggle we got a store opened, and crept on as well as we could, doing the work ourselves until we could keep a man fully employed, and afford to pay for it.

And now our store is the glory of the town; your humble servant has got his family grown up; and what with shares in the store and manufactory, he fears no bad weather, but is as happy as a cricket. Try it, neighbour, and in a few years you will rejoice over it as I do.

N.B.—In order that this tract may do the utmost possible good, the person receiving it is requested not only to read it carefully, but to hand it to another.

ISSUED BY THE
CO-OPERATIVE UNION LIMITED, LONG MILLGATE,
MANCHESTER.

**END OF
TITLE**